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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 001801

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STATE FOR AF/W
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIAN GOVERNOR LOSES FAITH IN VP

REF: LAGOS 1573

Classified By: Consul General Brian Browne for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary. Once an ardent supporter of Vice President Atiku, Abia State Governor Orji Kalu said Vice President Atiku's chances for capturing the PDP presidential nomination had diminished substantially. He claimed the President was ruthlessly choking pro-Atiku governors economically, and efforts among governors to unify around the VP were now futile. Forever ambitious, Kalu was sanguine about his chances for somehow emerging from the turmoil to become the dark horse. He also said popular frustration with the country's continuing poverty was on the verge of erupting, and he did not discount the possibility of civil disturbances or of a military intervention. End Summary.

VP's Support Base is Eroding

2. (C) Much of this October 29 was vintage Kalu: asperity in his critique of President Obasanjo and gasconade about his own nationwide popularity. However one thing was new. Previously Kalu had been a bit of a stalking-horse for VP Atiku. Now that Atiku is on the skein, it appears Kalu is selling off his stocks in Atiku's future. Previously an outspoken supporter of Vice President Atiku, Kalu downplayed the VP's chances of succeeding the President. He said that the President retained hopes of a third term and that Obasanjo was on a mission to obliterate all opponents to this goal. Given that Obasanjo's goal allows no space for Atiku as a running mate let alone a presidential candidate, the Vice President is clearly Obasanjo's number one target. Obasanjo will thus venture to great length to weaken Atiku directly or weaken him indirectly by hog-tying his supporters. Kalu alleged a conscious campaign to frustrate the economic interests of governors who had openly supported the VP. He angrily noted that no pro-Atiku governor had been allowed to control the recent issuance of membership cards during the membership registration exercise for the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in their respective states. This insult coupled with the PDP's pro-Obasanjo national secretariat seizing control of the party's state executive

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caused Kalu to skip the latest round of state party congresses. In a rare moment of defeatism, Kalu said he was considering leaving the PDP for a new party. (Comment: Since this conversation, we have learned that Kalu has overtured the Igbo-based APGA political party, the party which probably has the most genuine grassroots support in southeastern Nigeria. End comment.)

President Still Contemplating Third Term

3. (C) Kalu felt Obasanjo's intention was to retain his office "by any means necessary." He said an attempted constitutional amendment would be the preferred route, but he mentioned imposing a state of emergency as another possibility should the legal means not yield the desired political end.

4. (C) Kalu observed that Obasanjo's quest for a third term would be disastrous. Meanwhile the poor were getting poorer, the dearth of money in the system was strangulating businesses not tied to Obasanjo or his allies, and the consequent frustrations were being felt nationwide, particularly in the military, who do not regularly receive salary and who know their retired brethren receive their pension at irregular intervals. Kalu concluded that Obasanjo's financial reforms were a distraction to disguise his real intention of establishing an economy that superficially looked more liberal but in actuality was more tightly controlled by the President and his business coterie. Kalu said he would not be surprised at a "violent backlash," and he intimated there was growing support among many Nigerians for military intervention.

Abia State Governor Considers Presidential Bid

15. (C) Despite his notorious differences with Obasanjo, Kalu felt his own chances of somehow emerging with the Presidential grail were good. He said the current political dialogue and unity between the South-South and South-East geopolitical zones would result in a consensus candidate that would compel northern states to accept another southerner as President, and he had strong support in both areas. He said the two regions were treating a vice presidency as "fluff" and would not accept less than the Presidency. No other Igbo governor had enough national exposure to match him in the South-East, he estimated. The only South-South competition he saw would come from Rivers State Governor Odili, whom he believed was extremely unpopular because of his strongly pro-Obasanjo stance. He predicted the current front runners, including Obasanjo, Atiku, Babangida, and Marwa, would create a stalemate from which the South-East / South-South consensus candidate could emerge triumphant. He also claimed a good rapport with Northern elites who would find him to be an acceptable candidate. "I am as popular in the North as I am in Abia," Kalu beamed. (Comment: Depending on how you gauge Kalu's popularity at home - some say he is, some say he is not - this was either conscious self-adoration or unwitting faint praise. End comment).

Comment

16. (C) Kalu looked tired from internal party squabbles. He was more low key than in previous meetings. If he had not already done so, he appeared ready to sever his umbilicus to Vice President Atiku. Kalu was objective and probably correct in reading that the cards are stacked against the VP. However, he seemed the captive of wishful thinking in concluding that the deck would somehow reshuffle in a manner that, after all cards were dealt, he would be holding the strongest hand. Right now he is losing control of the PDP apparatus in his state. His ability to claim the ultimate prize is slimmer still. His certainty regarding a southern presidency would appear to be bravado in the face of increasing odds against, and his references to a possible coup additionally point to the desperation of the moment. End Comment.
BROWNE